

Home & Garden Mimeo # HG66

Clover Mites

Clover mites are very tiny animals about the size a period on a typed page. They have a reddish-brown globe-shaped body with eight yellow legs. The first pair of legs are much longer than the others and are held out in front.

Clover mites are nuisance pests in Maryland when they enter houses. They do not bite, carry diseases, damage food, or household furnishings except by leaving a red stain if crushed. Populations can be higher some years than others.

Ecology

Clover mites primarily live in lawns. They feed on grasses and herbaceous plants but usually do not damage them.

Newer lawns and new home sites seem to develop the highest populations. Real nuisance problems can occur for several years but then usually taper off. As a new lawn becomes established there are fewer factors favoring population increases and the clover mite numbers will become stable. Old lawns sometimes produce a mite problem when the lawns decline and are then heavily fertilized. It is not unusual to find a few wandering mites each spring under normal circumstances.

Clover mites are usually most noticeable in the spring when temperatures are between 45° and 80°F (7° and 30°C), and the atmosphere is humid. They also appear in the fall and even sometimes in the winter when temperature and humidity conditions are favorable.

Habits

Clover mites become active in lawns in late March and April. On warm days they cross the grass and crawl up the sunny sides of foundations and walls of buildings. The mites enter buildings through cracks around window and door frames or any other crevice that finally opens up inside the house. They are so small that screens will not stop them. When the temperature drops at the end of the day, they stop where they

are and remain motionless until it warms up. This means that thousands of mites can be under shingles and window sills waiting to resume their searching when the temperature rises the next day. This trend continues until consistent high or low temperatures end their wanderings for the season.



Clover Mite

How to Keep Them out of the House

It is possible to physically exclude mites by caulking around window and door frames. Use weather stripping where possible to keep them from crawling under windows. Also, caulk any cracks that might lead into wall voids that would give mites access into rooms.

A temporary method of excluding mites is to seal up windows with masking tape. Another method is to smear cooking oil or mineral oil on window sills. The oil traps mites where they can be wiped up.

Vacuuming clover mites is the quickest way to remove them once they are inside. This is also a much safer control than spraying them with aerosol insecticides.

Keeping Them Away

Where clover mites are a recurring problem, a barrier strip should be installed around the foundation. To be effective, the strip should be at least 18-24 inches (1/2 meter) wide. Remove the grass and cover the soil with black plastic and gravel. Plantings of marigolds, zinnias, iris, tulips, yew, arborvitae, and barberry, if sparsely planted, will not attract mites. Bark mulches are not as effective as stones and may harbor other pests such as millipedes and sowbugs which also come inside.

Control with Pesticides

Clover mite infestations can be reduced by spraying the foundation and portions of lawn close to the house with a pesticide such as Insecticidal Soap. Sometimes the whole lawn must be treated.

Immediate control however, may not be apparent for several days, and it may be necessary to retreat areas 2 weeks later.

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USE INSECTICIDES WITH CARE. READ THE LABEL DIRECTIONS. FOLLOW ALL SAFETY PRECAUTIONS.

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